

POTATOES

You find them clustered, like herds of ostriches with dark green tails, their heads in shallow, sandy soil. Chthonic presences, these bald, blind, thin-skinned Irishmen, uncovered in their barrows, are sexless as Tieresias, dirty and dumb as the Sibyl.

Osiris may have sprung again from such knobs -- whitish lumps of flesh or bone -- not corn.

Sold by the hundredweight like coal and plain as my fist but nourishing, they have the virtue of keeping where it's cool. Lacking all Southern glamour, they are best taken plain. Boiled, with a little salt, a bowl of them warms the heart of hunger's white dream.

THE CAULIFLOWER

Row upon unbending row, erected in the field like some miniature Corbusier village, ready for habitation, they stretch to the horizon on squat, knobby, layered pedestals, rising in shadowy gloom to a trelliswork of thick green trusses, holding aloft an acre of cataract eyes.

Crated, they enter your nose as cabbages.

And each is a huge Christian personage or Commonwealth, a mighty growth and stature of compacted flowerets.

Within that world's white dazzle of fibrous walls, labyrinthine passage, a forest of snowy stems rising to cloudy umbrage. Vegetable stalagmites. Frost columns. Thick white limbs flowering into blocky canopy. Fog compacted. A wooden mist in an underground street of white Victorian gothic. The heart of the heart of whiteness, still touched with palest green.

-- William A. Fahey

Northport NY